

THE IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT.

SPEECH

OF

HON. SIDNEY EDGERTON, OF OHIO.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 29, 1860.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the President's annual message—

Mr. EDGERTON said :

Mr. Chairman, I should not have claimed the attention of the House so early in the session, and perhaps not at all, but for the extraordinary violence which has characterized the discussion on the other side. Who, that has been an observer of the proceedings of this House since we first met, can doubt the existence of an irrepressible conflict? Hardly had we taken our seats here before an honorable member representing a slaveholding constituency threw the apple of discord into our midst, and for more than eight weeks kept this House disorganized, during which time Southern gentlemen and their Northern allies stigmatized the free and intelligent people of the North as false to the Constitution, and as traitors to the country. Week after week we have patiently listened to the most violent abuse of our people. Rhetoric and epithet have both been exhausted by patriotic gentlemen in their efforts to blacken the character of our constituents; and I am sorry to say, sir, that the most bitter assailants and exultant traducers of our Northern people have been found among that little band of Northern Democrats who on this floor are monuments of the sparing mercy and long-suffering of the North.

But, Mr. Chairman, I do not complain that this subject of slavery has been introduced; nor do I regret that it was first introduced and discussed for weeks by those who profess to deprecate its agitation. I knew that, sooner or later, it must come up for discussion. There is no political legerdemain that can keep it down. Congressional compromises and party

platforms have in vain attempted to silence agitation, and settle the controversy; but the strife has gathered intensity and force from the very efforts made to suppress it. The conflict is irrepressible! It is idle—worse than idle, it is madness—to attempt to ignore this question of slavery. It is the grand question of the age, and it will not be ignored; it pervades every part of our wide-extended land, and comes up here into the Halls of Congress, meeting us at the very threshold. This conflict grows out of the very nature of things. It has its origin in conflicting ideas, which form the basis of our two systems of labor. The system of free labor rests upon the Declaration of Independence; it finds its development at the North, and is sustained by the great Republican party. The slave system rests upon the idea that man, like the horse, is the subject-matter of property. This system finds its development at the South, and is supported by the Democratic party. These two ideas, which underlie these systems of labor, now meet for a final struggle. There is no evading the issue, and the North does not desire it. Let it be settled, now and forever. Let us know whether this Government is forever to be prostituted to the extension and support of slavery, or not.

Mr. Chairman, there is a growing spirit of freedom at the North, which will brook no delay and will tolerate no evasion. It insists that this Government shall no longer build up and support slavery; but that, wherever the General Government is responsible for its existence, we shall smite it to the dust. We say to slavery, take what is nominated in the bond, but not a tithe more. It has been made a subject of complaint on this floor that our Northern people are educated to believe that slavery

is wrong. I admit that the people of the North
 'abhor your cherished institutions. They be-
 'lieve, with Bolivar, "that slavery is an infringe-
 'ment of all laws, and that a law having a
 'tendency to preserve slavery would be the
 'greatest sacrilege." They believe, with Fox,
 "that personal freedom is the right of every
 'human being;" and with Burke, "that sla-
 'very is a state so improper, so degrading, and
 'so ruinous to the feelings and capacities of
 'human nature, that it ought not to be suffered
 'to exist." For myself, I can say that I look
 upon slavery as the climax of wickedness—
 peerless and unapproachable in its atrocious
 pre-eminence. Talk as you will about your
 rights of property in man, the Almighty has
 written with the finger of love upon the heart
 of every human being the consciousness that
 he has a right to himself. If we of the North
 err on this subject, we err with the greatest
 and best men of all ages. The founders of our
 Government believed, as we believe, that man has
 rights by virtue of his manhood; and they went
 so far as to say that *all* men had these rights—
 the right to life, the right to *liberty*—and that
 these rights were inalienable. They stood just
 where the Republican party stands to day. Not
 one of those great men ever endorsed the car-
 dinal doctrine of the modern Democratic party,
 which was so concisely stated by the gentleman
 from South Carolina, [Mr. BONHAM:]

"I do not look upon slavery as a social,
 'moral, and political evil, but I look upon it as
 'a social, moral, and political blessing and
 'good."

As early as 1773, Patrick Henry, in a letter
 to Robert Pleasants, says:

"Believe me, I shall honor the Quakers for
 'their noble efforts to abolish slavery. It is a
 'debt we owe to the purity of our religion, to
 'show that it is at variance with that law that
 'warrants slavery. I exhort you to persevere
 'in so worthy a resolution; I believe the time
 'will come when an opportunity will be offered
 'to abolish this lamentable evil."

General Washington, in writing to Robert
 Morris, says:

"I can only say, that there is not a man liv-
 'ing who wishes more sincerely than I do to
 'see some plan adopted for the abolition of sla-
 'very."

And, in his letter to Sir John Sinclair, he
 said:

"There are in Pennsylvania laws for the
 'gradual abolition of slavery, which neither
 'Virginia nor Maryland have at present, but
 'which nothing is more certain than that they
 'must have, and at a period not remote."

And at the close of his eventful life, as the
 crowning glory of his matchless career, he be-
 came a practical abolitionist, making every
 slave he possessed free. Thomas Jefferson, in
 his Notes on Virginia, says:

"There must, doubtless, be an unhappy in-
 'fluence on the manners of our people, pro-

duced by the existence of slavery among us.
 'The whole commerce between master and slave
 'is a perpetual exercise of the most boister-
 'ous passions, the most unremitting despotism
 'on the one part, and degrading submissions
 'on the other. Our children see this, and learn
 'to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal.
 'This quality is the germ of all education in
 'him. From his cradle to his grave, he is learn-
 'ing to do what he sees others do. If a parent
 'could find no motive, either in his philanthropy
 'or his self love, for restraining the intemper-
 'ance of passion towards his slave, it should
 'always be a sufficient one that his child is
 'present. But, generally, it is not sufficient.
 'The parent storms, the child looks on, catches
 'the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs
 'in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose rein
 'to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, edu-
 'cated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot
 'but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities.
 'The man must be a prodigy who can retain his
 'manners and morals undepraved by such cir-
 'cumstances. And with what execration should
 'the statesman be loaded, who, permitting one
 'half the citizens thus to trample on the rights
 'of the other, transforms those into despots,
 'and these into enemies; destroys the morals
 'of the one part, and the *amor patriæ* of the
 'other. For if a slave can have a country in
 'this world, it must be any other in preference
 'to that in which he is born to live and labor
 'for another; in which he must lock up the
 'faculties of his nature, contribute as far as
 'depends on his individual endeavors to the
 'evanishment of the human race, or entail his
 'own miserable condition on the endless gen-
 'erations proceeding from him. With the
 'morals of the people, their industry also is
 'destroyed; for in a warm climate no man will
 'labor for himself who can make another labor
 'for him. This is so true, that of the proprie-
 'tors of slaves a very small proportion, indeed,
 'are ever seen to labor. And can the liberties
 'of a nation be thought secure when we have
 'removed their only firm basis—a conviction
 'in the minds of the people that these liberties
 'are the gift of God? that they are not to be
 'violated but with his wrath? Indeed, I tremble
 'for my country when I reflect that God is just;
 'that his justice cannot sleep forever; that, con-
 'sidering numbers, nature, and natural means
 'only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an
 'exchange of situation, is among possible
 'events; that it may become probable by super-
 'natural interference. The Almighty has no
 'attribute which can take sides with us in such
 'a contest. But it is impossible to be tem-
 'perate, and to pursue this subject through the
 'various considerations of policy, of morals, of
 'history, natural and civil. We must be con-
 'tented to hope they will force their way into
 'every one's mind. I think a change already
 'perceptible, since the origin of the present
 'Revolution. The spirit of the master is aba-

'ting; that of the slave rising from the dust; his condition mollifying; the way, I hope, preparing, under the auspices of Heaven, for a total emancipation; and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.'

What Republican has ever used language more emphatic than this in condemnation of slavery? Colonel Mason, of Virginia, in the Convention which framed our Constitution, expressed the opinions of the framers of that instrument when he said:

"Slavery discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor when performed by slaves. They prevent the immigration of whites, who really enrich and strengthen a country. They produce the most pernicious effects on manners. Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of Heaven on a country."

In the Congress of 1789, when the kindred subject of the slave trade was under consideration, Mr. Parker, of Virginia, said:

"He was sorry the Constitution prevented Congress from prohibiting the importation altogether. It was contrary to revolutionary principles, and ought not to be permitted."

He said, further, on this subject:

"He hoped Congress would do all in its power to restore to human nature its inherent privileges; to wipe off, if possible, the stigma under which America labored; to do away the inconsistency in our principles justly charged upon us, and to show by our actions the pure beneficence of the doctrine held out to the world in our Declaration of Independence."

Mr. Madison, on the same occasion, said:

"By expressing a national disapprobation of that trade, it is to be hoped we may destroy it, and save ourselves from reproach and our posterity from the imbecility ever attendant on a country filled with slaves."

At the next session, Mr. Scott, alluding to the same subject, said:

"I am sorry the framers of the Constitution did not go further, and enable us to interdict the slave trade altogether, for I look upon it to be one of the most abominable things on earth, and if there were neither God nor Devil, I should oppose it on the principles of humanity and the law of nature; for my part, I cannot conceive how any person can be said to acquire a property in another."

The Republicans of to-day are denounced as traitors for adhering to the doctrines of the fathers. According to the new-light Democracy, it is rank treason to adopt the opinions of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Henry. But the other day, in the other end of this Capitol, I heard a distinguished Senator from Virginia [Mr. MASON] admit that the South, in a few years past, had changed its views upon this subject; and because we will not change with our Southern brothers, because we cling with

reverential love to the teachings of the fathers, we are stigmatized by the changelings as traitors to the Constitution.

Let me say to the Representatives of the South, the North has ever been true to the Constitution. No people so great and powerful ever before submitted to such wrongs as the free States have endured from the slave States of this Union. For years, in most of the slaveholding States, the most sacred provisions of the Constitution have been wantonly and persistently violated. Where is the liberty of speech and of the press in the slaveholding States? Can a Northern man go through your slave States and print and speak his opinions? Not if he believes in the Declaration of Independence. He may crawl through, by stifling his convictions and belying his manhood; but he cannot walk through erect, with the love of liberty in his heart and its utterance on his lips. Can the preachers of the Gospel discuss the moral bearings of slavery, and teach deliverance to the captive? Not at all. Only a few days since, a distinguished gentleman announced here, that if Beecher came South, they would hang him. And the gentleman from South Carolina [Mr. ASHMORE] informed the House, that in his State they had arrested a man for selling Helper's book among free blacks and non-slaveholders; that he was now in jail; and, with emphasis, he declared they would hang him.

Mr. ASHMORE. Will the gentleman allow me a word?

Mr. EDGERTON. Certainly.

Mr. ASHMORE. I asserted, I think—I do not remember the precise language I used—but I asserted, that he was distributing books among the free negroes and non-slaveholders for the purpose of exciting an antagonism between the non-slaveholders and the slaveholders; and that it was the non-slaveholders upon whom he had attempted to practice this insidious scheme, that first informed the better—I will not say better, but the more prominent—men of the district of the fact, which led to his arrest and incarceration in jail for a violation of the law of the State. I am glad, however, of the opportunity of correcting the statement to this effect. The letters communicating these facts to me were not altogether concurrent. Some stated one thing, and some another; but after a time, and after I made the remarks that I did here, on the occasion referred to by the gentleman, I ascertained the true facts of the case. This person had furnished, not a free man, but one slave, with one of these Helper books. That slave can read and write, as many of our intelligent and household slaves in South Carolina can; and it was intended by him to use that slave as his instrument, for the purpose, undoubtedly, of inciting other slaves to resistance to their masters.

Mr. EDGERTON. I am perfectly willing that the gentleman's explanation shall go into

my speech. Indeed, I desire it; for I wish it for circulation, and the explanation is not in conflict at all with the statement which I have made.

Now, I will confess I do not understand such a state of society. Is it really a crime in the South, punishable with imprisonment and death, to circulate a book among free men? and a book, too, as harmless as the *Impending Crisis*? I have heard gentlemen denounce that book in most violent language, asserting that it advised insurrection, treason, servile war, arson, and murder. I say that the book advises no such thing, and I call upon gentlemen to produce any such recommendation from that book. I presume that gentlemen who made the charges never had read the book. And yet, to sell this harmless book in a slave State is considered a crime. Where is your constitutional liberty? In what respect does the liberty of South Carolina differ from the despotism of Austria?

When I say that Northern men cannot travel in the Southern States, and give utterance to their opinions, I do not say that the laws prohibit it. But there is a power above law and above Constitution. That power is the power of the mob, controlled by the privileged class. In the presence of slavery, the law is silent, and the Constitution a nullity; for the right to hold property in man has become the supreme law of the land. The people of the free States respect all constitutional obligations; they guard with especial jealousy the liberty of speech and of the press. The most violent advocate of slavery can travel through any of our free States. He may preach for slavery, and against freedom, and he will meet with no molestation. Not a hand will be raised against him in violence; but from the farm and the workshops he will find men willing and able to discuss the subject with him. He may even publish his opinions in a book; we will not imprison or hang the man who circulates it; we can trust our people to read whatever may be written; we require no censors of the press.

How is it at the South? To be suspected of loving freedom better than slavery is a crime. Men, women, and children, are banished from their homes, and driven from your States, for the atrocious crime of loving liberty and hating slavery, not by process of law, but by the many-headed mob. A Northern man can travel with more safety in any part of the world than in our slave States. We can hardly take up a paper, but we see some new act of violence perpetrated upon our Northern people. The unfortunate victim may invoke the Constitution, but it has no protection for him. He may exclaim, I am an American citizen; but he will be answered with imprisonment, scourge, or gibbet. And yet we are gravely lectured for our want of respect for the Constitution!

Gentlemen of the South, the North demands of you the observance of constitutional obligations. She demands that her citizens be pro-

tected by your laws in the enjoyment of their constitutional rights. She demands the freedom of speech and of the press; and if your *peculiar* institution cannot stand before them, let it go down, for the rights of a nation are not to be thrown away because they conflict with your system of bondage.

Mr. Chairman, it is vain to talk of further concession to slavery. We have no confidence in its integrity. We have trusted to its plighted faith, and found it puny. Its last great act of treachery shuts the door of compromise forever. We have yielded to its demands, and it has only increased its arrogance and sharpened its appetite for yet greater demands. Let slavery restrain its inordinate lust for power; let it take its place under the Constitution, and not above it; let it respect the rights of others, and cease its aggressions; then it will be time for its advocates here to lecture the free States about their constitutional obligations. We hear much about the rights of the South—indeed, we have heard little else; and one would suppose, listening to the speeches on the other side, that there were no rights except Southern rights. We do not hear of natural rights, or the rights of American citizens, but the rights of the South. What do you mean by the rights of the South? Not the rights of your four million slaves; not the rights of the great mass of our white brothers, the non-slaveholders. You certainly do not mean these; you mean the rights of the privileged few, the rights of the slaveholding aristocracy. And, by a strange perversion of language, the party which is arrayed against the rights of the many, and sustains the most arrogant demands of the slaveholding aristocracy, is called the Democratic party! Mr. Chairman, I have heard strange doctrines avowed here. I have heard Democrat after Democrat defend slavery on principle, and yet not one Democrat has arisen to condemn or reprobate it—no, not one. I had supposed that if anything was fixed in the theory of our Government, or sustained by the teachings of our religion, it was that man had certain God-given rights; that these rights were indefeasible; that these rights existed before, and were superior to, all Constitutions and all laws; that they formed the true basis of all political association; and that “to secure these inalienable rights, Governments are instituted among men.”

But, in these latter days, I find that new light has burst upon the world; Democrats no longer admit that men have inalienable rights; for to admit that, brands slavery as a wrong; and slavery, say they, is right—essentially right—a great moral, social, and political blessing and good. Not African slavery, but slavery as a principle, black or white, is right *per se*. The gentleman from Mississippi, [Mr. LAMAR,] in his able speech the other day, attempted to show that the Bible sanctioned slavery; if it did, it was white slavery. Indeed,

the gentleman did not attempt to sustain slavery upon the foolish pretext of color, but he based it upon the startling assumption that the stronger class has a right to enslave the weaker. It is an alarming doctrine, that physical or mental superiority confers upon the possessor additional rights; for who has not a superior? And if this be the true doctrine, where is the man who may not at any moment become a slave? This has always been the tyrant's plea. Entrenched behind the Divine right of superior birth, or superior class, he imposes his despotic will upon his cringing subjects. There is not a despotism to-day but sustains itself upon the very argument by which Democracy attempts to justify slavery.

When we assert that slavery is contrary to natural justice, we are asked for the evidence. I see that evidence in the intellectual and moral capabilities of man, which assert the right of improvement, and which slavery denies; I see it in the eternal aspirations of the human heart; I see it in the blight and ruin which ever follow, sooner or later, in the footsteps of slavery; and finally, I see that evidence in the fact that slavery denies to man every right; for the very idea of slavery is the exclusive ownership of one man by another. Blood, bone, sinew, and soul, all belong to the master. According to the Louisiana code—

"A slave is in the power of the master, to whom he belongs; the master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, his labor; he can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire anything, but what must belong to his master."

I hold in my hand a pamphlet, which some gentleman has kindly sent me from Mississippi. It appears to be a report made to the Southern Commercial Convention, held at Vicksburg, May 10, 1839. The object of this Convention appears to have been to look after the much talked-of Southern rights in general, and the opening of the African slave trade in particular. From this Southern pen, we have a more enlarged definition of slavery.

Mr. BRANCH. Will the gentleman allow me to set him right on a question of fact?

Mr. EDGERTON. Yes, sir.

Mr. BRANCH. I understand the gentleman from Ohio to say that the object of that Southern Commercial Convention was to look after the opening of the slave trade. Perhaps the gentleman is not aware of the fact that, when that subject was introduced into the Convention, it was voted down by an overwhelming majority of the Convention, and that the object of those Conventions has no connection whatever with the African slave trade, but is to promote and encourage Southern commerce. Let me state the additional fact, that the introduction of this subject into that Southern Commercial Convention has destroyed and broken up the whole system of Conventions that had lasted for years.

Mr. EDGERTON. It is a report from a committee of seven, appointed at a previous Southern Convention, and made by the chairman of that committee, Mr. Henry Hughes, of Mississippi, "pending the discussion of the resolutions of Mr. Spratt, of South Carolina, in favor of the repeal of the laws of Congress prohibiting the African slave trade." It appears to have been a well-considered and unanimous report. I read from the pamphlet:

"5. The value of the association is the laborer himself, and not, as in free labor, the private contract or labor obligation. In the free system, the labor obligation is property; but in the slave system, the laborer himself is property. The man himself is a negotiable chattel; his soul is ignored; he is a brute; he can be sheared like a sheep, branded like a mule, yoked like an ox, hobbled like a horse, marked like a hog, and maimed like a cur; he can be butchered like a beef, skinned like a buck, or scalded like a shoat; he can be hurled into a fishpond to fatten and flavor lampreys, or smeared with tar and set on fire to light ungodly dances.

"6. The continuance of the association is systematic. This is slavery's eminent advantage over free labor. The hireling's association is a variable, whose functions are climates, soils, idiosyncrasies, race, education, morality, and religion. The free laborer thus works when he pleases, as long as he pleases, for whom he pleases, and for what he pleases. But the slave works not as he pleases, but as his master pleases. The slaves thus are economically so continuous, adaptable, and regular, that strikes and idleness are virtually eliminated. Indeed, slavery is nothing more than labor obeying unchecked, unregulated, and irresponsible capital."

I will not attempt to add anything to this picture of what slavery is, as defined by Southern men; but I may be permitted to ask, "Is slavery a good—good for the master and good for the slave? a blessing which should be fostered by the General Government?" Again: if slavery be right, then the labor of the slave is a duty which he owes to his master; and to follow the sentinel north star to Canada and freedom, would be larceny. And besides, if one man may justly be made a slave, so, then, may all others; if man has no rights as *man*, then everything is left to the blind sway of chance; the strong enslave the weak, and might becomes the measure of right. This ghostly atheism can never meet the approval of our people. It dethrones God, and enthrones instead the devil of discord and strife. I am thankful that no party at the North can maintain such doctrines and live. That sectional Democratic party is fast dying out; in fact, it has now no existence at the North, except a sort of commercial existence. A few cotton merchants, a few cotton divines, and a few cotton politicians, constitute its strength. Be not

deceived, gentlemen of the South. They are a *Swiss guard*; they serve for pay, and do not represent the opinions of the people.

Mr. Chairman, the old cry of disunion has been raised here; not by Republicans, not by any member on this side of the House, but by Democrats; and day after day this Hall has rung to the shriek of disunion. We have heard the same cry before; it has become familiar to our ears, and it has always been the precursor of some new aggression upon freedom and the rights of the North. There was a time when that cry could excite alarm; there was a time when it could extort concessions; but that time has passed. It is now impotent for evil. If you of the South are resolved upon disunion, why delay? Proceed at once to your purpose. The gentleman from Georgia [Mr. CRAWFORD] stated the issue some days since, when he said:

"Sir, this question has resolved itself at last into a question of slavery and disunion, or no slavery and Union. My position is taken; that of my constituents is taken; the position of the North is taken, and there is no mistaking that position."

Yes, sir, the position of the North is taken, unmistakably taken, against slavery and disunion, and in favor of Union and freedom. In a subsequent part of his speech, he states the contingency which, in his opinion, would justify disunion:

"Now, in regard to the election of a Black Republican President I have this to say, and I speak the sentiment of every Democrat on this floor from the State of Georgia; we will never submit to the inauguration of a Black Republican President. [Applause from the Democratic benches, and hisses from the Republicans.] I repeat it, sir; and I have authority to say so; that no Democratic Representative from Georgia on this floor will ever submit to the inauguration of a Black Republican President. [Renewed applause and hisses.]"

There is no ambiguity in this; and I commend the gentleman's frankness, if not his zeal. Here is the Democracy of an entire State, it seems, in favor of disunion.

The honorable gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. DAVIS] is equally explicit. He said:

"Gentlemen of the Republican party, I warn you. Present your sectional candidate for 1860; elect him as the representative of your system of labor; take possession of the Government as the instrument of your power in this conflict of 'irrepressible conflict,' and we of the South will tear this Constitution in pieces, and look to our guns for justice and right against aggression and wrong. Decide, then, the destinies of this great country. We are prepared for the *decision*."

Another gentleman from the same State [Mr. SINGLETON] said:

"You ask me when will the time come;

when will the South be united? It will be when you elect a Black Republican—Hale, Seward, or Chase—President of the United States. Whenever you undertake to place such a man to preside over the destinies of the South, you may expect to see us undivided and indivisible friends, and to see all parties of the South arrayed to resist his inauguration." * * * "We can never quietly stand by and permit the control of the army and navy to go into the hands of a Black Republican President."

A gentleman from South Carolina, [Mr. BONHAM,] in a speech delivered here a few days since, said:

"As to disunion, upon the election of a Black Republican, I can speak for no one but myself and those I have the honor here to represent; and I say, without hesitation, that, upon the election of Mr. Seward, or any other man who endorses and proclaims the doctrines held by him and his party—call him by what name you please—I am in favor of an immediate dissolution of the Union. And, sir, I think I speak the sentiments of my own constituents and the State of South Carolina when I say so."

I cannot continue these extracts, but will close by citing one other, from the very able speech of the honorable gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. CURRY:]

"However distasteful it may be to my friend from New York, [Mr. CLARK,] however much it may revolt the public sentiment or conscience of this country, I am not ashamed or afraid publicly to avow that the election of William H. Seward or Salmon P. Chase, or any such representative of the Republican party, upon a sectional platform, ought to be resisted to the disruption of every tie that binds this Confederacy together. [Applause on the Democratic side of the House.]"

These, sir, are but samples of what we have heard daily from the Democratic side of this House. I think it is safe to say that the Southern Democracy is a unit on the question of disunion, or perhaps I should say the question of rule or disunion. It matters little what may be the views of Northern Democrats, for they are powerless in the party. Theirs is the ignoble duty of endorsing the platform when laid down by the South, and supporting the candidate the South places upon it. But what do these threats of disunion mean? Is it the language of menace? I trust not; it will not move a man from his purpose, but if I know anything of the spirit of our Northern people, it will arouse an indignation that will sweep away the last vestige of disunion Democracy! It is an insult which the North ought and I trust will resent. It amounts to just this: You Republicans—you men of the North—if, in a constitutional way, you dare to elect a man to the Presidency who reflects your opinions on this subject of slavery, we of the South, we Demo-

crats, will tear this Constitution in pieces; we will dissolve the Union. What, sir! does the South deny the right of a constitutional majority to rule in a constitutional way? Is an election binding upon us, provided your candidate is elected? and are you free to disregard and repudiate it, should our candidate succeed? Is this the unequal contest to which you invite us? As honorable men, will you go into the contest with this predetermination? While you can rule, it is well; but if the majority decide against you, then you will tear the Constitution to pieces.

Thank God, we of the free States hold our rights by no such uncertain tenure as your will, but by virtue of the Constitution and our own manhood. Through the long night in which slavery has ruled this land, we have submitted to its iron sway; for years we have seen this Government all on the side of slavery! No man could hold office under it from the free States, unless he first went under the yoke. The slightest suspicion of love for universal liberty excluded the possessor from all participation in this Government, and for a Northern man to say a word against the Union was rank treason. But at the South, how different! To advocate slavery was no crime, and to denounce the Union a positive virtue. We have seen men pass warm from the rostrum, where they had denounced the Union, into the highest offices of the land; they fill the Halls of Congress, take their places in the Cabinet, or go on foreign missions. We have seen all this, and peaceably submitted; and now, when we take the baton of power, think you we shall allow you to wrest it from our grasp, and that, too, over a violated Constitution? No, gentlemen; we disregard your warnings, and we scorn your dictation! When the people have brought in their verdict, that verdict will be executed. If it be against us, we will submit, as we have done before; if it be against you, you will submit also.

Sir, gentlemen talk about dissolving this Union, as if it were a pastime—a holiday sport. Do they realize all the horrors of such a disruption? This Government cannot pass away without a struggle—without civil strife, and garments rolled in blood. It was a grand sight when the aged Fabricius stood up before the Carthaginian Senate, and, holding in his hand his gathered robe, he proffered them war or peace. But it is a lamentable sight, when gentlemen stand here in the Congress of these United States, and say to the majority, "If you dare to exercise your rights, we will destroy the Union; we will tear the Constitution to pieces." Let me ask you, gentlemen, to look before you leap into this abyss. Now is the time for deliberation, and not after the fatal step is taken.

For what do you propose to dissolve this Union? What is the end to be attained? The spread and perpetuation of slavery? The dis-

tinguished gentleman from Georgia, [Mr. CRAWFORD,] in his speech, said:

"We have now four million slaves. In some twenty-five years hence, we will have eight million. We demand expansion. *We will have expansion* in spite of the Republican party, and all the Abolitionists of the Old and New World."

The gentleman from Mississippi, [Mr. SINGLETON,] in the speech to which I before referred, said:

"I ask, again, what will be the future of the Southern slaveholder? If slavery be confined to its present limits, the institution will necessarily be overthrown. It is only a question of time. We have now four million slaves in the fifteen Southern States. That population doubling itself, according to the census returns, every twenty-five years, by natural increase, to say nothing of African importations, we will in fifty years from now have sixteen million."

Think of it—sixteen million slaves in the land, whose Declaration of Independence proclaims the equal rights of man. More than five times the number of inhabitants in this country at the time of the Revolution. At the same increase, in one hundred years there would be sixty-four million slaves in this land of the free and this home of the brave. But, says the gentleman, I tell you here this day—

"The institution of slavery must be sustained. The South has made up its mind to keep the black race in bondage. If we are not permitted to do this inside of the Union, I tell you that it will be done outside of it. Yes, sir, and we will expand this institution; we do not intend to be confined within our present limits."

It is, then, for this institution of slavery that you are going to dissolve this Union. But when you have broken down the Constitution, and set up the standard of revolt, the newly-elected President, whose duty it will be to see that the laws are executed, will send the army, backed by the wealth and power of the nation, to enforce obedience; and, in that fierce struggle, how would your peculiar institution stand the shock? It now exists only by the permission of the civilized world. A hand raised against it, a word, a look, and it trembles to its base. If it will not stand before Helper's book, how will it endure the presence of an invading army? The standard of revolt will be the signal of emancipation; and the man who raises that standard must covet the crown of martyrdom which he undoubtedly would wear. Tell me not that slavery is an element of strength. If it be, why destroy the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press? Why expel from your midst the friends and advocates of freedom? Why surround it with a Chinese wall of ignorance, and fortify it with bloody and terrific penal enactments? And, finally, if slavery be that natural and felicitous state I have

heard represented on this floor, why is the Christian world shocked by the cold-blooded barbarism of Southern legislators, who propose to banish from their homes thousands of free men and women, or reduce them to slavery? No; slavery is as weak as wicked! How could it be otherwise? "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" There is a fearful and sometimes an intimate connection between national sins and national retribution. It is one of the decrees of the Almighty, written in the past history of the world, that nations shall not trample with impunity upon the weak and defenceless. Well might Jefferson "tremble for his country when he considered that 'God was just, and that His justice would not sleep forever.'"

We are told, defiantly, that if slavery cannot have expansion inside of the Union, it will have it outside of the Union; in other words, unless we consent to the rule of slavery, the Union shall be dissolved. Gentlemen, if that is your determination, *now* is the time to strike, for the rule of slavery is broken; and if there is anything fixed, *religiously* fixed, in the minds of our people, it is that slavery shall never extend another inch in this Union. We will not consent to expand this evil, and stand guardian over your coming millions of slaves; and I submit to our Southern brothers if it is wise to keep up this sectional strife, to press upon us this eternal agitation? If you are resolved to make slavery, as you have made it, the test in politics, I will not complain, for the free States are fast outstripping your slave States in population, and the question will very soon be settled. If you desire peace, you can have it; only be satisfied with what you have, remembering that there are rights North as well as South, and that our Constitution was made to

secure the blessings of liberty, and not to impose upon men the curse of slavery. True, we love liberty, and hate slavery. We are inflexibly attached to our free institutions; we see in them the approval of Heaven.

Look over the free States; see their wonderful achievements in arts, in agriculture, in commerce, and in literature; see their free churches and free schools. They are proud monuments to freedom; grand and perpetual anthems to free labor and *free men*. If you think slavery a good, you must keep it, if you will; but spare us the shame of its support. Ask us not to countenance what the late member from Harper's Ferry district and present Minister to France (Charles J. Faulkner) so justly describes "as the bitterest drop from the chalice of the destroying angel." If you choose to linger in decrepitude and decay—to hug the cankering curse of slavery to your bosoms—do it; we at least will be free; we wash our hands from its pollution.

Sir, our position is definitely taken, and I would have no one deceived. The giant North, at last, stands erect. "Don't back down, as you have done before," said the gentleman from Georgia, [Mr. CRAWFORD.] We deserve the burning taunt for our past subserviency. But the gentleman may allay his fears; he may quiet his apprehensions; there will be no backing down.

We cannot falter; did we so,

The stones beneath would murmur out,

And all the winds that round us blow

Would whisper of our shame about.

No! let the tempest rock the land,

Our faith shall live, our truth shall stand.

True as the Vaudois hemmed around

With papal fire and Roman steel;

Firm as the Christian heroine bound

Upon Domitian's torturing wheel,

We bate no breath, we curb no thought,

Come what may come, we falter not.

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